

Virtual Office Myths

1. **I won't know they are working from home**
2. **Virtual Office Employees must have a computer to work from home.**
3. **I won't get promoted if I work from home.**
4. **Virtual Office Employees are not available when you need them.**
5. **A virtual office setup is not for everyone, so it's not fair**
6. **Everyone will want to work from home.**
7. **Equipment will be expensive.**
8. **Virtual Office Employees cause more work for supervisors**
9. **Virtual Office Employees cause more work for coworkers.**
10. **Our type of jobs are not compatible to a virtual office environment.**
11. **The public would not support State employees working from home.**
12. **Our employees deal with confidential information so they can't work from home.**

I won't know they're working at home.

What Experience Has To Say:

Supervisors discover they are better able to monitor the work by shifting the focus from how much work the employee looks like he or she is accomplishing to how much he or she actually is accomplishing. By focusing on the work product instead of the work activity, many supervisors find they are better able to communicate clear expectations to their employees. When supervisors and a virtual office worker agree on job expectations, it often leads to increases in employee productivity and job satisfaction. Many supervisors already use this method of management by results.

Mid-level managers and front-line supervisors reported that they felt supervising an employee working from home involved a change in management style from management by observation of the job being done to management of the results. The participants

routinely reported as positive any changes they made to their management style in order to more effectively supervise a VO employee.

As reported by senior managers, logs and time sheets and daily or frequent contact with virtual office worker were the most typically used monitoring strategies.

Seventy-seven percent of State non-virtual office worker and 86% of State virtual office workers disagreed with the statement that, "It is difficult to track the work products of virtual office worker."

State VO pilots consistently show that, after six months, both virtual office worker and their supervisors believe that a VO environment has increased the VO workers productivity. Productivity increases because employees have fewer distractions and interruptions, work at their personal peak times, and are less stressed due to the absence of the commute.

The most commonly mentioned benefits of VO by senior managers were increased work efficiency and productivity, and increased employee morale.

Ninety-two percent of the Virtual office worker and seventy-two percent of the non-Virtual office worker disagreed with the statement that they would get less work done if they worked from home part of the time.

Virtual office worker must have a computer to work from home.

What Experience Has To Say:

AHCCCS will be providing the necessary computing and telephony equipment required for the VO worker to perform their job.

I won't get promoted if I work from home.

What Experience Has To Say:

Actually, current research suggests a virtual office worker is more likely to be promoted than their non-VO coworkers according to a study mentioned in the Advanced Management Journal, Summer '92. The reason for this may be that Virtual office workers tend to be selected by management because they work well independently and can be trusted to perform well remote from the office environment.

Eighty-nine percent of State Virtual office workers disagreed that they felt out of the loop when working from home.

The employee survey found no significant difference in promotion rates between a Virtual office worker and a non-Virtual office worker.

Virtual office workers are not available when you need them.**What Experience Has To Say:**

A virtual office worker will work with their supervisors during training to create an individual agreement where responsibilities are restructured to maintain work group integrity and plan how they will maintain communication with the office and what will be done to meet contingencies. If the telecommuter is needed, he or she may be asked to come in to the office or join an emergency staff meeting by conference call.

Ninety-two percent of Virtual office workers and 80% of non-Virtual office workers disagreed with the statement, "A Virtual office worker is never around when you need them." State managers disagreed in the same proportion as employees.

VO is not for everyone, so it's not fair.**What Experience Has To Say:**

Offering the opportunity to work at home is a management option; VO is not a universal employee benefit. Supervisors may select employees who have right tasks, abilities and circumstances at home necessary to become a virtual office worker. But an employee's participation in the State's VO program is entirely voluntary. Not having the opportunity to work from home is not a grievable offense. VO is not for everyone and not everyone wants it. The focus on fairness can be deceiving. We all have different needs. Rather, look at fairness as offering several flexible work options like flextime or compressed work weeks so most everyone will have the opportunity to get the flexibility they need when they need it.

Everyone will want to work from home.**What Experience Has To Say:**

Most people prefer the normal work week. Everyone does not want or need the same flexibility in the work place. Flexibility in the workplace is not usually offered as a universal employee benefit, but at the option of management. A State employee with information handling tasks at least part of the time may be a candidate for VO. A successful virtual office worker is self-motivated and results-oriented employees who work well independently. They need minimal supervision, are currently successful in setting priorities, meet deadlines and take the initiative to communicate with team members. Beyond this, they need the right atmosphere and equipment to work from home.

A strong majority of non-VO respondents answered that they perform at least one VO job task on a regular basis. Of non-VO participants 83 percent indicated that their jobs task were suitable

for VO, but 33% were not willing or didn't have resources at home to enable them to work from home.

Equipment will be expensive.**What Experience Has To Say:**

Many employees find the opportunity to work from home is so worthwhile they choose to use their personal equipment when equipment is not available from their offices. Many agencies have computers that people can take home

The costs associated with implementing VO are small when compared to the costs of not implementing such options; consider the costs of continued loss of employee productivity due to stress, low morale, burnout and turnover. LA County, one of the largest VO programs in the country, found a 20:1 benefit to cost ratio in the fourth year of their VO program.

A strong majority of State employees (83%) indicated that their job tasks were suitable for VO. Sixty-seven percent of State employees have or would be willing to purchase the equipment necessary to allow them to telecommute.

A virtual office worker causes more work for supervisors.**What Experience Has To Say:**

Managing employees on a flexible schedule will require more communication of the work product and expectations. One of the extra benefits of flexible work options is that it forces management by task and objective. Many managers have found that the increase in quality communication with employees has reduced their overall workload over time. Reduced interaction with coworkers also forces communications to be more direct and business-like.

Managers and supervisors felt that there was no difference supervising a VO employee or a no VO employee, this was a non-issue. In all six groups supervisors and managers reported selecting virtual office worker based upon their previous good performance. In the majority of cases, the VO employee had to agree upon tasks to perform while at home and this performance was monitored closely.

Seventy-six percent of States non-Virtual office workers and 85% of the States Virtual office workers disagreed with the statement that, "It takes more time to supervise a VO employee".

Virtual office workers cause more work for coworkers.**What Experience Has To Say:**

Before VO, supervisors and virtual office workers go through several training exercises to help them determine how they will manage their normal office duties without burdening coworkers.

When surveyed, coworkers repeatedly responded that a VO employee does not impede the office routine and that the program should be expanded.

Seventy-five percent of the states non-virtual office workers and 87% of the states virtual office workers disagreed with the statement that, "Having employees work at home makes my job more difficult."

Sixty-six percent of states non-virtual office workers and 72% of states virtual office workers disagreed with the statement that, "Scheduling meetings around the VO employee causes difficulties in my work unit."

Our type of jobs aren't compatible to a virtual office.**What Experience Has To Say:**

Research does not verify that complete businesses or categories of jobs are incompatible with VO. Jobs are really just a collection of tasks. Some tasks must be done at the office. Tasks which may be done away from the office are called VO tasks. The amount of VO an employee may do, depends on how many VO tasks they have each week and whether the equipment required to accomplish those tasks is available. VO is an individual arrangement where responsibilities are restructured to maintain work group integrity. Those arrangements are created by confronting the concerns and working out solutions.

A strong majority of non-VO respondents answered that they perform at least one VO job task on a regular basis. Of non-VO participants 83 percent indicated that their jobs tasks were suitable for VO.

The researcher noted that the major difference within groups occurred between those who were currently involved and those who had never been involved. This typically occurred when a barrier was raised by a non-VO participant and a solution was suggested by a VO participant. For example, to the stated objection by a focus group participant that his employees did not have job tasks that were suitable for VO, another supervisor currently supervising a vVirtual office worker responded that it was possible to reorganize job tasks so that VO was an option.

The public would not support State employees working from home.**What Experience Has To Say:**

Contrary to popular belief, the public understands the need for flexibility in the workplace and is in favor of offering the opportunity to qualified State employees.

Almost seven out of ten of those surveyed responded favorably to a plan that would allow qualified State employees to work at home one or two days a week instead of driving to work. The main reason people are favorable to a VO plan is that it would cut down on pollution and reduce traffic. Another frequently cited reason is that VO provides the ability to spend more time with family.

Our employees deal with confidential information so they can't telecommute.**What Experience Has To Say:**

Information security is a legitimate concern but VO should not create a significantly greater concern than is currently the case in the office. State VO policies stipulate that restricted access materials not leave the office without supervisory approval. Again, telecommuter/supervisor training and VO Agreements are used to answer the individual concerns and needs of each telecommuter, supervisor and their non-VO coworkers. During the training, supervisors and the virtual office worker will go through several exercises to help them take a closer look at what it will be like to work apart from the office full time. Worksheets help them identify and resolve potential complications before they become problems.

While State employees considered immediate access information and reference materials to be important to their jobs, virtual office workers were less likely to find this a barrier to VO.

Seventy-six percent of the states non-Virtual office worker and 82% of State Virtual office worker disagreed with the statement that, "People who handle confidential information should not work from home."